

One Lincoln

City of Lincoln Commission on Human Rights News

Director Larry Williams Resigns

The Lincoln Commission on Human Rights said farewell to their esteemed director of 11 years with a party on Aug. 12. The public was invited to share well-wishes, and to say "Thank You" to its director, Larry Williams. The event was held at the K Street Complex where the Commission is currently housed. Williams, who has been director since 1999, stepped down to take care of his ailing mother.

"I think it's been important," Williams told the Lincoln Journal Star, "I felt privileged to have been the director... I feel very good about some of the things that we've done over the last 10 years."

Larry will not only be missed by his colleagues, but by the community members he worked with and helped in his 11 years of service.



Larry Williams

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Human Rights
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Meet the Faces of LCHR

With the resignation of its Director, we don't want anyone to think the Lincoln Commission on Human Rights is fading away! Please meet our Civil Rights Investigators Angela and Margie, and our Community Liaison, Loren.

Angela Lemke is the Senior Civil Rights Investigator for the Lincoln Commission on Human Rights.

Angela has been employed with the Commission in varying capacities for thirteen years. Angela's primary



responsibilities include investigating and conciliating complaints of discrimination in the areas of housing, employment, and public accommodation.

She also provides training and outreach to the public on various civil rights and equal opportunity issues and laws. Angela graduated from Lincoln School of Commerce in 1997 with an Associates

Degree as a Paralegal, and has continued her education in the Civil Rights field by attending various conferences, trainings, and workshops involving equal opportunity.

Margie Nichols is a Civil Rights Investigator for the Lincoln Commission on Human Rights.

Margie is responsible for the intake and investigation of complaints. She serves as the primary investigator



for housing complaints, which includes settlement of these complaints, and is the agency's liaison with Housing and Urban Development.

Margie has a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Journalism. Her association with the Commission began in 2005, while she was with the Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission, which was housed in joining office space. She started as

LCHR's Senior Office Assistant in November, 2006, and became an investigator in March of 2008. Margie also assists in providing trainings and technical assistance to the general public, landlords, property management companies, employers, and employees.

Loren Mestre-Roberts is the Hispanic-Latino Liaison for the City of Lincoln, and the Commission on Human Rights.

In 2010 Loren began as the Hispanic-Latino Liaison, a



position created by the Mayor's Office to improve communication within city departments, the Juvenile Justice System, non-profit agencies, and the Hispanic-Latino population in Lincoln.

In September, Loren's role was expanded to serve with the Commission doing community outreach regarding fair employment and fair housing practices. One of

her main concerns is citizens of all ethnic groups have a voice to help prevent discrimination and foster equal opportunities for all Lincoln residents.

Rod Confer, City Attorney will be heading the Administrative duties of the Commission.

Mr. Confer was appointed Lincoln City Attorney by Mayor Beutler in late 2009.



Rod is a graduate of the University of Nebraska College of Law where he was Editor-in-Chief of the Nebraska Law Review. In 2007 and 2009 he was named a Super Lawyer of the Great Plains in General Litigation and he is a Fellow of the Litigation Counsel of America. Before entering government practice Mr. Confer was with the Lincoln law firm of Knudsen, Berkeimer, Richardson & Endacott for more than 30 years.

LCHR Restructuring, Relocating with Support from City Law Department

LCHR Director Larry Williams' recent retirement and City finances led to the reorganization of LCHR as a division within the City Law Department beginning with the 2010-11 budget year. The Law Department has taken over supervision of LCHR and provides clerical assistance for Commission investigations and meetings. This partnership provides greatly needed administrative and secretarial support, ensuring that the Commission continues to function as efficiently as possible.

City Attorney Rod Confer has assumed responsibility for administration of the Commission with assistance of Law Department Executive Assistant Terri Storer. "Title 11 of the Lincoln Municipal Code contains some of Lincoln's most important ordinances, protecting our civil rights," Confer said. "The City Law Department is honored to join with the Commission to meet this responsibility to the people of Lincoln. Transition of LCHR into the City Attorney's office has gone very smoothly and this arrangement should enhance the Commission's investigative work and outreach efforts."

LCHR's relocation from the 'K' Street Complex to newly-constructed offices on the third floor of the County-City Building is a side benefit of the reorganization. LCHR will have its own entrance and office suite close to the

Law Department, which should enhance administration and support for Commission functions. A freshly-decorated office and LCHR's prominent location on the same floor as the Mayor, Personnel Department and City Attorney is intended to demon-

strate to clients that civil rights is an important aspect of Lincoln's government. It is currently anticipated that the new offices will be ready for occupancy in the early months of 2011.

LCHR has not been immune to the plague of budget concerns that has infected government at every level in recent years. Not too long ago the Human Rights Division had four employees; this year it will have

only investigators, Angela Lemke and Margie Nichols, on a full-time basis. To assist them in taking over the important outreach that Larry Williams carried out, the City has enlisted additional part-time help. Loren Mestre-Roberts, the City's Hispanic-Latino Liaison, will serve as Outreach Coordinator. Mema-Shua Grant, an AmeriCorps Member with experience in organization of human services activity, will provide valuable assistance with Lincoln Public Schools presentations, LCHR's sponsorship of its annual Civil Rights Conference and other outreach functions.

Investigators Lemke and Nichols will continue to investigate unfair housing, employment discrimination and other complaints alleging violation of Lincoln's equal opportunity laws. Assistant City Attorney Jocelyn Golden remains in the position LHRC legal counsel.

This partnership will provide greatly needed administrative and secretarial support, ensuring the Commission continues to function as efficiently as possible.

Supporting the Endeavors of Future Civil Rights Advocates and Community Activities

The Commission is pleased to introduce two other team members, Jessica Sanchez, an Intern from the University of Nebraska—Lincoln, and Mema Grant, AmeriCorps Member from Lincoln Parks and Rec "Reach for the Stars" AmeriCorps.

Jessica Sanchez is a Senior at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln, majoring in International Studies. She has a passion and drive to ensure equality for all. Jessica is majoring in International Studies. Jessica is focused on learning the details of working cases, and understanding the clerical details associated with each case. She helps both investigators with the complaint process, learning the process from start to finish, and all the details that are needed to be handled in between. She aides the investigators in preparing documents as well as sitting in during intake interviews. Her career goal is to work with the United Nations and fight for equality and civil rights globally.

"Overall, the cases I have worked on with the investigators have only confirmed what my career goal has always been and that is to fight for equality—represent the people who can-

not represent themselves, and to supply the community with resources..." Jessica states overall she is "so thankful the commission gave me this opportunity as it is truly a blessing. I have learned so much about this community, and most importantly, myself."

Mema Grant is an AmeriCorps member who has a personal goal to increase self-empowerment in all areas of human services. Her background includes working in many areas of human services, community development, direct case management services, with both adults and youth. She is excited for her new position, primarily focusing on outreach, education, and prevention.

"The Commission has taught me to view services from a different aspect," she said, "and sometimes that view isn't very becoming of Lincoln, but if we know about discrimination that is happening today, we can combat and prevent it in the future."



History of the Lincoln Commission on Human Rights: A City's History

A key aspect of the Lincoln Commission on Human Rights (LCHR) is to work with the community to raise awareness of discriminatory employment, housing, and public accommodation practices, and inform community members of LCHR's existence and function. Outreach activities include presentations to community groups, schools, companies, and individuals. LCHR also engages in functions and activities with community groups, businesses, schools, and governmental entities for the purpose of promoting understanding between races, cultures, and sexes, and to work to eliminate inequalities and sources of inter-racial friction.

The Commission has been in existence for over 40 years, and was created by a majority vote by Lincoln community members. LCHR also recognizes that the history contained within the Community far exceeds any history found in books, in newspapers, and in reports. LCHR started a search of its history over the past few years by utilizing its AmeriCorps Member each year, as well as a large donation of newspaper articles from former Commissioner, Gary Hill, and Mrs. Josephine Henderson (widow of LCHR's 1st Director, Gerald Henderson).

This year, the research has taken another path. Along with the Commission's History, we want the City's History, as it relates to the Commission. Specifically, we are looking for information/details of incidents, events, times, people, organizations, places, photographs, or anything else that could help link the past to the present. This history is im-

portant to LCHR, but also to the Community of Lincoln. There are incidents that show the need for the Commission, not only before and during its creation, but still today.

The need for this information to be gathered now rather than later is due largely to prevent the loss of information with the passing of esteemed and respected community members. This loss occurs across all planes of races, cultures, genders, and religions, and the information needs to be captured.

Reading about incidents in Lincoln's history is informative, seeing physical reminders (photographs, letters, etc) is intriguing, but learning the history by someone who was involved, in attendance at events or perhaps a member of community organizations, is probably the most vital key to Lincoln's past, and therefore, future.

The use of the information will be primarily for outreach and education. The Commission wants to create a visual timeline of Lincoln events showcasing not only incidents, but people and organizations. This information will be used for community events that the Commission partakes in, and can be integrated into outreach, again, connecting the Commission to the Community of Lincoln, not just on paper, but in history.

If you are interested in sharing any history from Lincoln's Civil Rights History, please contact:

Mema Grant
(402) 441-7625
MGrant@lincoln.ne.gov

**Nominations are being sought for the
Gerald Henderson Human Rights Award .**
If you would like to nominate someone who epitomizes
commitment and resolve in seeking equal opportunity and
justice for all, contact **Angela Lemke at 441-7624**, or visit:
<http://www.lincoln.ne.gov> keyword: Rights

Suit Filed Alleging Religious and National Origin Discrimination

(08/31/10) DENVER – The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) filed two lawsuits today in federal court alleging that JBS USA, LLC, which does business as meat packing company JBS Swift & Company, discriminated against a class of Somali and Muslim employees at its facilities in Greeley, Colo. (its headquarters facility), and Grand Island, Nebraska.

The suits allege that JBS Swift created a hostile work environment for its Somali and Muslim employees due to their race, national origin, and religion. The suit filed in Nebraska alleges that supervisors and coworkers made comments to Somali employees at the Grand Island facility such as “lazy Somali” and “go back to your country.” Both complaints further allege that JBS Swift retaliated against the employees by terminating their employment when they requested that their evening break be moved so that they could break their fast and pray at sundown during the month of Ramadan, an Islamic holiday requiring a daytime fast from sunup to sundown.

During 2008, the EEOC received 85 discrimination charges from employees at the Grand Island facility alleging discrimination on the basis of religion, race/color, or national origin. The charges were investigated by EEOC, CO Civil Rights Division, and NEOC.

“The issue of national origin and religious discrimination in the workplace has become more significant as more immigrants with different ethnic and religious backgrounds join our workforce.”

—EEOC
General Counsel
P. David Lopez



Haven Manor Faces Lawsuit For Refusing Hearing-Impaired CNA

(06/03/10) LINCOLN, Neb. – Haven Manor, Inc. violated the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) when it refused to accept temporary placement of Amanda Huff, a hearing-impaired certified nursing assistant (CNA), at its assisted living facility in Lincoln, Neb., the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) charged in a lawsuit.

The EEOC claimed that in September 2007, a staffing agency, sent Amanda Huff to Haven Manor in response for a request for a CNA to cover short-staffing on the evening shift. The EEOC further alleges that after Huff, an excellent lip reader, spent about 20 minutes in orientation with a Haven Manor representative, she asked if she could have someone set her pager to vibrate rather than produce an audible alert. It was at this time that representatives of Haven Manor discovered that Huff is hearing-impaired. A Haven Manor representative informed Huff that she could not work the scheduled shift because of her hearing impairment and sent her away.

“Americans with disabilities overcome innumerable obstacles throughout their lives in order to be able to compete on equal footing with people who are not disabled,” said EEOC attorney Melvin Kennedy. “The ADA and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 were enacted to prevent employers from denying employees with disabilities the equal opportunity to compete for jobs, promotions and other benefits of employment.”

The Right to Choose Where to Live

The Lincoln Commission on Human Rights (LCHR) is committed to the prevention of housing discrimination, as well as advocacy and education of Fair Housing. One way of prevention is to raise awareness of rights and responsibilities of tenants, along with education to increase awareness of Fair Housing Mandates.

LCHR has partnered with Lincoln Housing Authority (LHA) to present information to current Section 8 Voucher Holders through weekly classes offered by LHA.

Lincoln Housing Authority has also undertaken a program called RentWise. The program was originally created by the Universities of Wisconsin and Minnesota and licensed to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension.



RentWise is a tenant education program that helps people know how to find and keep decent rental housing, and how to become more successful renters. Renters who complete this program of six modules earn a certificate of completion to show potential landlords and property managers that they want to be good tenants.

For more information on attending RentWise classes:

Lincoln Housing Authority
5700 R Street, Lincoln, NE
434-5500
<http://www.l-housing.com>

Nominations are being sought for the 2011 Fair Housing Award.

If you would like to nominate someone who seeks equal housing opportunities for all, contact **Angela Lemke at 441-7624, or**
alemke@lincoln.ne.gov or visit:
<http://www.lincoln.ne.gov> keyword: **rights**

Jurisdiction:

The City of Lincoln Human Rights Commission has jurisdiction to investigate alleged discrimination complaints in the areas of employment, housing, and public accommodation occurring within Lincoln's city limits. We do not have jurisdiction to investigate alleged discrimination complaints involving City, County and State Government employees, offices or facilities, or state universities.

Resources:

- **Discrimination complaints outside of Lincoln City limits:** Nebraska Equal Opportunity Commission—402-471-2024 or the regional Equal Opportunity Commission office in St. Louis, MO (800) 669-4000
- **City agency complaints**—City Ombudsman/Mayor's Office (402) 441-7511
- **University of Nebraska-Lincoln employment complaints** — UNL Affirmative Action (402) 472-3417
- **Lincoln Police Department complaints**—Internal Affairs Division (402) 441-7204, Citizen Advisory Board (402) 441-6351, or Mayor's office (402) 441-7511
- **Jail/Penitentiary complaints**—Ombudsman at the State office for Corrections (402) 471-2035
- **Landlord-Tenant disputes**—Lincoln Action Program Specialist (402) 471-4515
- **Complaints about legal matters**—County Attorney (402) 441-7321, Southeast Nebraska Legal Services (402) 435-2161, Nebraska Attorney General (402) 471-2682, or Nebraska State Bar Association (402) 475-7091
- **Advocacy Services for people with disabilities**—League of Human Dignity (402) 441-7891 or Nebraska Advocacy Services (402) 474-3183.



**Fair Housing.
It's Not an Option.
It's the Law!**

If you feel that you have been denied the right of purchase, rent or are otherwise discriminated against when dealing with a person regarding housing and believe this was on the basis of your race, color, gender, religion, marital or familial status, disability, or national origin; please call the Lincoln Commission on Human Rights and set up an intake interview. Our phone number is (402) 441-7624, our services are free, and all of our cases are completely confidential.